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ABSTRACT

The nature of five mentor-intern relationships was investigated throughout the 1987-88 school year in four different, formalized mentoring projects in upstate New York. Subjects consisted of pairs of more- and less-experienced teachers. Variables considered in selecting the pairs included age, experience, gender, race, content area, context, subject area, ratio of interns to mentors, and first- and second-year participation by the school district. In-depth case studies were produced from data obtained from interviews and observations. Selective characteristics of the five pairs, as well as noteworthy aspects of four different local projects and five relationships are presented in outline form. Four out of the five cases documented satisfactory mentor-intern relationships. Conclusions drawn from the study include: (1) a satisfactory relationship can be created in a formal program; (2) considerable flexibility in the program is advisable; (3) a satisfactory relationship is enhanced when the pair receive common release time; (4) mentor training is important; (5) mentors should be self-selected, flexible, approachable, experienced teachers who can work well with adults; (6) formalized relationships can be fortified by personal as well as professional dimensions; and (7) an early start produces positive feelings about the program and the relationship. (JD)

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Formalized Mentoring Relationships: Do They Work?

by

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Formalized Mentoring Relationships: Do They Work?

by Ann M. Bower, Ed. D.

The presentation of this paper occurs in the season for graduations. College and university graduations have recently been completed, and high school graduations are shortly about to begin. As a result, hundreds of commencement addresses have been or are about to be given. These graduation speakers will routinely include in their presentations congratulatory remarks to graduates embarking on many different roads. It is unlikely that many of them will remember to include words about the importance of relationships as one journeys through life. Yet relationships may prove important not only to satisfaction in one's personal life, but one way through which persons can also grow professionally.

While most of life's interpersonal relationships begin informally, some of these relationships may be created within formal programs. The teaching profession has joined the ranks of a growing number of professions involved in the work of creating formalized relationships in such programs. These kind of relationships, externally arranged ones, are the foci of this paper.

Mentor teacher-intern teacher formalized relationships can occur in a pure mentoring program or other formal programs with a mentoring component. The facilitators of

such programs often assist in the "making of the matches" between a highly regarded, experienced teacher and a beginning teacher. These arrangements are made within an organization which often has program expectations that are made public within the specific context. Courses that are to be taken, observations to be conducted, and after-school meeting times for sharing are a few examples of requirements that individual school districts have written into their mentoring programs.

Whatever the genesis of a formalized mentor-intern relationship, this relationship seems to be the core, the heart of a formal program. It is through the relationship that the needs of a beginning teacher seem to be best met. There has been, however, little documentation about what occurs in such a formalized relationship. Though not a happenstance alliance, it becomes the unique creation of two persons. Change, even transformation, appears possible for both participants.

Still skeptics wonder if externally arranged matches can produce a substantive number of relationships that are truly beneficial for the participants. It is sometimes suspect that the assignment of a particular, experienced teacher to a specific, first year teacher can encourage the professional and personal growth of an intern teacher. Recent research, however, provides useful documentation and description of formalized mentor teacher-intern teacher

relationships that can and do facilitate the results in question.

The Author's Research

Using qualitative methods, the nature of five specific mentor-intern relationships was investigated throughout the 1987-1988 school year in four different, formalized mentoring projects in upstate New York that had been accepted for funding by the State's Mentor Teacher-Internship Program. Subjects consisted of pairs of more-experienced, less-experienced teachers who agreed to partake in this investigation. Age, experience, gender, race, content area, context, subject area, ratio of interns to mentors, and first and second year participation by a school district were all variables considered when selecting dyads from those available for study.

Interviews and observations were conducted concerning mentors' and interns' perceptions about the formalized, on-going relationships in which they participated. Subjects were asked about the beginnings of their relationships, the manner in which each relationship developed, the interplay between the relationship and the program in which it was nested, and possible effects of the relationship on their professional and personal lives. From these data, a variety of in-depth cases, averaging thirty pages each, were produced. Special education teachers, elementary education

teachers, and secondary education teachers were included in these cases. In addition to the cases, individual responses were given to the four sub-questions that made up the principal question. Several pervasive themes also emerged.

An Overview of the Cases

Selective characteristics of five M-I pairs, as well as noteworthy aspects of four different, local projects and five relationships, are presented herein in outline form. Pertinent information prerequisite to the understanding of certain conclusions flowing from this research is also offered.

It is important to note that four out of five cases documented satisfactory mentor-intern relationships. In the fifth case, the participants, Mary and Cheryl, described their relationship as a less-than-satisfactory one. In spite their perception, each member of this dyad stayed working together until June, pointing to other benefits they received from participation in New York's MT-IP.

Conclusions arrived at as a result of this study are offered for consideration. Application of these conclusions to policy and practice then follow.

Case Study I - Cathy and Joe
Case Study II - Cathy and Madge

CHARLESVILLE CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mentor(part time). Cathy: a white female in her forties: special education teacher at Sherman Elementary School: worked with two (and later three) special education interns.

Intern. Joe: a white male in his thirties: special education teacher at Corcoran Elementary School: worked with Cathy, the mentor, and initially one other intern, Madge.

Intern. Madge: a black female in her forties: special education teacher at Sherman Elementary School: worked with Cathy, the mentor, and initially one other intern, Joe.

Released Time Arrangements: Mentor and interns released regularly one day a week, usually Wednesdays.

Figure 1. Selective Characteristics of Two Special Education M-I Pairs

Noteworthy Aspects of the Local Project and Each Particular Relationship in Case Studies I and II

- district's second year in Mentor Teacher-Internship Program
- mentor taught same specialized area as the intern, Joe, in another building, a considerable distance away and the intern, Madge, in the same building as the mentor.

In regard to beginnings

- implementation of formal program - first few days of October

- beginning of formalized relationship
  Case I - started because the mentor was requested by both the program coordinator and the principal of the new teacher's school to take on this additional neophyte who was in danger of being fired. The mentor began looking at what the intern did right from the very first meeting and positive, repectful interaction appeared to have been the norm.

  Case II - the mentor and intern had known one another from the previous school year in which the intern had worked in the same building as another teacher's aide. Both had requested to be matched with one another, so the "official" relationship started off well.

In regard to mutual trust and respect

- Case I - intern initially quite hesitant to trust completely because of past life experiences but expressed respect from the start. Trust was firmly established around mid-year.

- Case II - both qualities became established early in the "official" relationship because of previous knowledge about one another.

In regard to intern's professional and personal development

- Case I - support provided for growth in self worth, organization, planning, and interpersonal communication

- Case II - support provided for growth in self confidence and, therefore, made use of the considerable skill the intern already possessed - inspiration also provided in serving in community service work.

In regard to training

- mentor sent to two national conferences on mentoring and peer coaching

In regard to endings

- culminating activity of project - no formal activity planned. (There was an end-of-the-year picnic for all special education teachers at mentor's home in June.)

- ending of formalized relationship
  Case I - mentor and intern perceived one another as friends and colleagues.

  Case II - mentor and intern perceived one another as friends and colleagues.

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FREAR CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mentor(part time), Karen: a white female in her fifties: kindergarten teacher at Parkview Elementary School: worked with one kindergarten intern.

Intern, Betsy: a white female in her late twenties: kindergarten teacher at Parkview Elementary School: worked with Karen, the mentor.

Released Time Arrangements: none: stipend paid for time spent outside of the regularly scheduled school day

Figure 2. Selective Characteristics of a Kindergarten M-I Pair

Noteworthy Aspects of the Local Project and the Particular Relationship in Case Study III

- district's second year in Mentor Teacher-Internship Program
- mentor taught same grade level: classrooms of two teachers across the hall from one another.

In regard to beginnings

- Implementation of formal program - last few days of October
- Beginning of formalized relationship - started when a complaint was made by the intern and informal mentor to the administration about the intern being placed in a late-in-the-year arranged match with another experienced teacher whom the district had chosen. Because of their concerns, the relationship of the informal pair was formalized, instead of the new one. This formalization continued the bonding that had begun in August when the two teachers voluntarily chose to work together after school and on weekends.

In regard to mutual trust and respect

. became firmly established in a relatively short but intense time period - even though the mentor and intern seemed quite different in personality and style of teaching.

In regard to intern's professional and personal development

. encouragement, support, and affirmation given to intern's distinctive character traits - mentor enthusiasm about the intern's creative ideas not only encouraged her to share with other teachers, but also to consistently test these ideas out in her own classroom.

In regard to training

. none offered by district, nor was any requested by mentor

In regard to endings

. Culmininating activity in project - proposed picnic at the home of the local teacher association's president for all mentors and interns. Later, this was cancelled.
(The intern took the mentor to dinner, accompanied by another mentor-intern pair)

. Ending of the formalized relationship - mentor and intern perceived one another as close friends and colleagues.

Case Study IV - Gretchen and John

PRICE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mentor(full time). Gretchen: a white female in her forties: secondary English teacher on special assignment: worked in three buildings: Lawler Intermediate School. Price Junior High School. and Atwood Senior High School. with several interns.

Intern. John: a white male in his thirties: secondary science teacher at Atwood Senior High School: worked with Gretchen. the mentor.

Released Time Arrangements: mentor released 100% of her classroom instruction time: intern released 20% classroom instruction time daily.

Figure 3. Selective Characteristics of Secondary Education M-I Pair

Noteworthy Aspects of the Local Project and the Particular Relationship in Case Study IV

- district's first year in Mentor Teacher-Internship Program
- out-of-content area mentor (all seven other interns to whom this mentor was matched were also in different content areas)

In regard to beginnings

- implementation of formal program - September 3rd
- beginning of formalized relationship - started at orientation session with other interns - first one-on-one meetings were positive, even though the intern at first experienced some conflicting feelings about a pedagogical mentor.

In regard to mutual trust and respect

. seemed to become established about December, then grew consistently throughout the relationship.

In regard to intern's professional and personal development

. support provided for the intern to improve in techniques. such as transitioning, planning, covering certain amounts of work in specific amounts of time - also encouragement of the intern to persist in his work with students-at-risk and in outside activities that would parallel this interest.

In regard to training

. staff development courses in Project Teach, Mastery Teaching, and Peer Coaching were a requirement of local project. Mentors and interns received a stipend for attendance. (Mentor was also familiar with mentoring and adult development research)

In regard to endings

. culminating activity in project - last official meeting in June structured as a "kind of final party" to which interns were encouraged to bring relatives and two other people in the school district who had helped them in any way during the school year.

. ending of the formalized relationship - mentor and intern perceived one another as friends and colleagues.

Case Study V - Mary and Cheryl

BEECH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mentor(part-time), Mary: a white female in her fifties: primary grade elementary teacher at Rockefeller Elementary School: worked with one elementary art teacher, Cheryl.

Intern, Cheryl: a white female in her early twenties: elementary art teacher at Rockefeller Elementary School: worked with Mary, the mentor.

Released Time Arrangements: mentor and intern released 20% classroom instruction time daily.

Figure 4. Selective Characteristics of an Elementary Education M-I Pair

Noteworthy Aspects of the Local Project and the Particular Relationship in Case Study V

- district' first year in Mentor Teacher-Internship Program
- out-of-content area mentor

In regard to beginnings

- implementation of formal program - second week of October
- beginning of formalized relationship - first meetings seemed somewhat productive since the intern appreciated the release time and reduction in number of students taught per week in art. She soon became resentful, however, that she had survived the most difficult weeks of school without a mentor and was then reluctant to accept advice from a teacher of the primary grades.

In regard to trust and mutual respect

. never seemed to become firmly established - possibly impeded by quite different personalities, styles, and/or the undermining of the relationship by other teachers in the intern's department.

In regard to intern's professional and personal development

. assistance was given in classroom management and organizational skill

In regard to training

. none offered by the district other than a few inservice days in which the dyad was encouraged to take an Essential Elements refresher workshop being offered to other district teachers. (The mentor occasionally expressed a desire to have some kind of training in mentoring)

In regard to endings

. culminating activity in project - no formal activity planned. (The mentor did invite the intern and her husband out to dinner in June, but invitation was declined.)

. ending of the formalized relationship - mentor and intern appeared to have remained acquaintances

Conclusions

A. A facilitative mentor-intern relationship between teachers can be created in a formal program. Furthermore, the nature of formalized mentor-intern relationships appears to be similar to the nature of those reported in informal relationships, especially once they have become established in mutual trust and respect.

B. There is evidence to support the desirability of considerable flexibility in the way a local project is structured and, hence, supports the mentor-intern relationship.

C. Although the existence of common released time doesn't guarantee a satisfactory relationship, and the absence of common released time doesn't necessarily mean that an unsatisfactory relationship will result, the chances of a satisfactory relationship are enhanced when the participants receive common released time, even though provision of this time may present some administrative difficulties.

D. Mentor training and other preparatory sessions related to that role can be important to mentors. Such sessions increased the mentors' self confidence, self esteem, and sense of empowerment.

E. Mentors should be self-selected, flexible, approachable, highly thought-of teachers with experience in the district in which they work and an ability to work well with adults.

F. Formalized relationships can be fortified by personal dimensions as well as professional ones.

G. Implementation of an early start can produce positive feelings about both the program and the relationship.

The Application

The following implications are offered for consideration and implementation to policy makers in states' educational agencies:

1. Since the majority of relationships in this research were quite satisfactory, they serve as evidence that suggests facilitative relationships can be initiated and sustained through a formalized program. Therefore, states or agencies who have an interest in teacher induction might adopt the mentor-intern model of induction as a means of providing some of these benefits for new teachers entering the teaching profession.

2. Facilitative, formalized relationships can be developed even when there is considerable variety in the design and implementation of programs within the

mentor-intern model of induction. It is suggested, therefore, that the structure or framework upon which to build a program contain some flexibility in order to provide for urban, suburban, and rural school districts' needs, for the needs of particular districts and the schools within them, and for the specific needs of the individual mentors and interns.

3. Common released time may be one of the most important factors in the formation of satisfactory, formalized relationships (Even though participants in one relationship were not released from classroom instruction time, they worked together on their own after school and on weekends). The provision of time away from regular instructional duties was highly praised in three out of five cases in this research. Since time greatly supports the development of the mentor-intern relationship, it is suggested that ways to provide such support be extensively investigated and encouraged.

4. The training sessions that some mentors received appeared to have provided them with an understanding of principles and skills related to the work of mentoring. A clearer understanding of what is involved in differing kinds of facilitative mentor-intern relationships also seemed to result. It is, therefore, suggested that local

projects be encouraged and supported in the provision of quality training.

Additional implications regarding practice are suggested for initiation, implementation, and/or improvement of local educational agencies' "induction through mentoring" programs.

1. Serious consideration must be given to the selection of mentor teachers within a formal program. This selection might be best accomplished through the work of a selection committee, composed of a majority of teachers, which establishes the criteria and receives letters of recommendation from students, members of the community, other teachers, and the administration. The committee might then choose the appropriate mentor for a specific intern from those who have previously volunteered.

2. It seems important that opportunities to have mentor-intern relationships with personal dimensions be made available. Therefore, when a mentor is matched with more than one intern, it should be determined what is feasible to expect from this mentor in terms of the time necessary to develop such relationships.

3. A program that begins at the start of the school year can set into motion the particulars necessary for development of satisfactory relationships (Most of the

positive relationships reported in this research had early formal or informal early starts). Furthermore, early first meetings can serve as one indication of the value a district places on the establishment of such relationships. It is, therefore, advisable for programs to start in a timely fashion, preferably late August or the first week in September.

Recognition of the power of the formalized mentor-intern relationship is beginning to grow. Moreover, it can be asserted that these relationships can be stable and satisfactory. They also can facilitate the ends for which they were intended, namely to provide assistance and support for beginning teachers as they transition into their careers.

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